Sportscape as a constraint on soccer attendance: Is it predicted by place attachment and by team identification?

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Abstract

Despite the poor stadium conditions, the average soccer attendance in Belgium has been slightly growing during the last decade. The objective of this paper is to investigate whether team identification (TI) and place attachment (PA) explain why spectators accept this sportscape, this is, accept the poor stadium conditions, and still attend games. An online survey was completed by 4,028 Belgian respondents (89.3% male; M_{age} = 35.1, *SD* = 15.5). Results reveal that fans with a stronger TI, fans with a stronger PA, and younger people are less constrained by the sportscape when deciding not to attend a game (*b*=-.07, *b*=-.12, and *b*=.25, respectively, $p < .001$). Moreover, PA partially mediates the relationship between TI and SC (*z*=-6.78, $p < .001$).

Keywords: sportscape, team identification, place attachment, constraints on attendance, soccer stadium

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Regardless of the specific core business, providing a venue of a suitable quality has usually been a prerequisite for the presence and for the satisfaction of spectators at an event. However, in many soccer stadiums these situations do occur, even though soccer generates huge amounts of money and sponsorship deals as the biggest sports industry in the world, especially in Europe (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004).

In Belgium, the reference country of our research, most first division soccer stadiums do not meet the current standards of comfort, accessibility, or technological infrastructures, and they are becoming obsolete. For example, Zulte Waregem, the Belgian vice-champion of the season 2012-13, had to play the qualifications for the Champions League at the stadium of Anderlecht, almost 80 kilometers away, because their home stadium did not meet the minimum requirements for the European competitions. In a recent study among Belgian fans, 87% stated that they would attend more games at their club's home stadium if the stadium conditions would be better, and they rated the stadiums with only six points in ten, in average (Vandewalle & Wauters, 2014). Fans mainly complained about the conditions of the toilets, the cleanliness of the stadium in general, the accessibility, and the parking conditions.

However, despite the rather poor stadium conditions, the average soccer attendance in Belgium is slightly growing since 2005 (Mapfurno, 2014). The average number of spectators per game increased from 9,715 during season 2004/05, to 11,836 during season 2013/14, indicating an increase of 2,000 spectators per game.

One of the possible reasons why spectators tolerate these rather poor stadium conditions is their team identification (TI), this is, their emotional connection with the team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In fact, previous studies have revealed that TI is the most important predictor of attendance independently of other factors, explaining between 15% and 21% of

its variability (Kim & Trail, 2010; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Wann, Bayens, & Driver, 2004; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Won & Kitamura, 2006). Strongly attached fans might attend games anyway, because they place less importance to external constraints, such as rather poor stadium conditions.

Another possible reason why people still seem to accept these inadequate stadium conditions and keep attending games is their place attachment (PA), this is, their emotional connection with the place (Moore & Graefe, 1994), and in this case, the stadium. A passionate link with the stadium goes beyond the tangible conditions, and might stimulate people to attend live games, as well as care less about the stadium characteristics. Sacred words such as "cathedral" or "holy ground" are applied to the stadium and to the ground where the stadium is located, respectively (Costa, 1997). This happens inclusively when the stadium is not modern and could be improved (Charleston, 2009). Sometimes, moving to a new and better stadium can be a traumatizing event for the fans, even if the new "home" is located near the original (Giulianotti, 1999). This emotional relationship of the fans with the home stadium of their club might be so important, that a rather poor sportscape plays a smaller role on the non-attendance decision of the fans. In other words, an inferior sportscape might be a less relevant constraint on attendance when the PA is stronger.

The objective of this paper is to investigate the relationship between TI and the sportscape as a constraint on attendance (SC), and between PA and SC. More specifically, we want to investigate if a stronger TI or a stronger PA are related to the fact that sportscape is less important in the non-attendance decision of the fans. The concepts of TI and PA have not been investigated in relation to how fans are influenced by an inferior sportscape in their non-attendance decisions. TI, PA and SC have not been studied simultaneously and in relation to each other before. Therefore, this exploratory research intends to fill this gap in the research,

and add up to the theoretical background about TI and PA, by modeling the relationship between TI and PA, between TI and SC, and between PA and SC.

The Royal Belgian Football Association and the Belgian clubs have repeatedly stated that their aim is to increase the number of people attending live games by assuring a good fan experience (Martens, 2012). In order to achieve this objective, the federation is planning five bigger soccer stadiums in collaboration with some clubs, to be ready by the year 2020. In this context, this research is also valuable from an applied perspective. The emotional connection of fans with the club and with the stadium cannot be underestimated (Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999), both in the old, and in the new stadiums. In this manner, the specific relationship of TI with PA, and their overall relationship with the sportscape should attract the attention of both researchers and marketeers.

Conceptual framework

The sportscape, this is, the physical environment of the stadium (Wakefield, Blodgett, & Sloan, 1996), includes the interior and the exterior fixed elements such as stadium access, facility aesthetics, scoreboard quality, and perceived crowding, comprising seating comfort and layout accessibility. Even though Wakefield et al. (1996) did not take into account non-fixed elements in their model, we decided to include service quality (for example, food service, stadium security, cleanliness) in our definition of the concept, because it can be controlled by the facility management. This inclusion of the non-fixed stadium elements in the sportscape model is in line with the work of Wakefield and Sloan (1995), and of Hill and Green (2000). It has been found that the more the sportscape is positively evaluated, the more people intend to attend sports events, at least with respect to minor league baseball games and major college American football games (Wakefield et al., 1996). Findings from Hill and

Green (2000) also showed that a positive sportscape perception enhances the likelihood that supporters of the home team would attend future games, in Australian rugby. However, in the present research we chose not to focus on the perception of sportscape, but rather on the emphasis that the fans put on the sportscape when they decide not to attend a game, this is, on the sportscape as a constraint on attendance (SC). A poor sportscape has been refered to as one of the constraints on sports attendance (Douvis, 2007; Wakefield, et al., 1996).

One of the few studies about the relationship of constraints on attendance with other factors has explored the relationship between ticket pricing as a constraint on attendance and TI (Wann et al., 2004). Wann and Branscombe (1993) referred to the concept of TI as the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected, is involved with and has invested in the team, and sees the team as an extension of the self. TI corresponds to the social identification concept of the social identity theory (Turner & Tajfel, 1979). The research of Wann et al. (2004) showed that for the more strongly attached fans, the price of the tickets is a weaker constraint on attendance. However, research has not yet investigated the relationship of other constraints, such as a rather poor sportscape, with TI.

Research about TI has been receiving a great deal of attention in several team sports contexts, this is, in different sports and countries. For instance, regarding motives to attend, research in softball and baseball indicated that lowly identified fans are more likely to be motivated by entertainment and sociability than strongly identified fans (Gau, James, & Kim, 2009). TI has been mainly related to factors that influence the attendance decision. Nevertheless, what encourages fans to attend may not be reflected in what discourages fans from attending (Tomlinson, Buttle, & Moores, 1995). However, the relationship of TI with constraints on attendance has been overlooked. Specifically, the relationship between TI and SC has not been established.

Place attachment (PA) refers to the extent to which a person has an emotional, functional, cognitive, symbolic, spiritual and/or affective connection with a physical place, environment, or setting, at a particular moment in time (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Smaldone, Harris, Sanyal, & Lind, 2005). Other authors have given the concept a different name, such as "special places", "place bonding", or "sense of place" (Hammitt, Backlund, & Bixler, 2006; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Nanzer, 2004; Smaldone et al., 2005). The concept of PA has been used in recreational and natural settings such as national parks or sky resorts (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). In those contexts, the findings revealed that the more meaningful a destination was to the visitors, the less likely it would be substituted by another place (Williams, et al., 1992). In the professional team sports context, PA has been connected with the emotional attachment fans feel to the home stadium of their club (de Carvalho, Theodorakis, & Sarmento, 2011). In fact, the stadium is, most of the times, a special place to the fans, and it represents home as well (Charleston, 2009). For example, they associate the stadium with their youth, or they have pleasant memories of past experiences at the stadium, such as being there with the family and the friends, or they have memories related with the club history.

The research about PA is currently in an embryonic stage when compared to research about TI. While TI has been widely studied, PA is a relatively new concept when it comes to studying the attachment of the fans to a stadium and its neighborhood, as it was only recently brought to the team sports context by de Carvalho et al. (2011). The relationship between the emotional connection with the stadium, namely, PA, and the SC has not yet been established.

Hypotheses

Hall and O'Mahony (2006) stated that more strongly identified fans are not focused on issues such as the venue, or on the sportscape, but much more on the team itself. The sportscape perception of these fans might be negative, but they may nevertheless choose to continue to attend the games, because they do not see a poor sportscape as a constraint. Consequently, a stronger TI and/or a stronger PA might mitigate the importance of the sportscape when people decide not to attend a game.

More specifically, we expect fans with a stronger TI to be less sensitive to the conditions of the venue or to the conditions of the service at the stadium, and, therefore, to place less importance on the sportscape in their decision to not attend. Previous research has shown that TI was related to perceived service quality (Gau et al., 2009). However, we propose that the attendance decision of fans might not be based on their perception of service quality, or perception of the quality of the venue, but on the importance they attribute to the sportscape. People with a strong TI attend games no matter what, and they do not care so much about other factors than the team itself. As Wann and Branscombe (1990) stated about teams with a losing record, "die-hard fans will persevere with their chosen team through almost anything…" (p. 111). Therefore, we hypothesize that *the more fans display TI, the less they place importance on the SC* (Hypothesis 1).

In the same manner, for fans with a strong PA, the conditions of the stadium may be less relevant for their attendance decision, this is, the emotional connection with the stadium might lead fans to place less importance to the sportscape. The fan might think "I'll go anyway; no matter if there is no parking place, or if it rains over me – I feel good to be at the stadium, I have great memories of personal/club related experiences there". This idea is supported by the study of Charleston (2009), who found that fans of clubs with old stadiums

had stronger connection with the stadium than fans of clubs with new stadiums. Therefore, we hypothesize that *the more fans display PA, the less they place importance to the SC* (Hypothesis 2).

According to Lee, Jae Lee, Seo and Green (2012), the more positive associations that people have with the club, the stronger their connection with the venue will be. Westerbeek and Shilbury (1999) stated that the place is more important for the fans that identify strongly with the club. Therefore, fans that are strongly identified with the club are likely to be strongly attached to the stadium, and consequently to place less importance to the sportscape when they decide not to attend. In this manner, we expect that TI not only has a direct negative effect on SC, as proposed in Hypothesis 1, but also through PA. Therefore, we hypothesize that *PA would partially mediate the negative relation between TI and SC* (Hypothesis 3).

Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

The present research included soccer fans of clubs from the first and second Belgian league. More than 70% of these clubs are located in the Dutch-speaking regions of the country. People were invited to answer a fifteen-minute online survey through social media (ex: e-mail, Facebook pages and blogs of the clubs), and also through a popular Flemish newspaper (paper and online version). Therefore, the survey was conducted in Dutch. As an extra motivation, a lottery of a prize, namely, a season ticket to their favorite team was raffled.

The final sample consisted of 4,028 respondents, with 89.3% males (M_{age} = 35.05, *SD* = 15.49; $M_{financial\ status}$ = 3.63, *SD* = 0.8, on a 5-point scale, from 1 – financially really

difficult to live, to 5 – financially really easy to live). About 40% of the respondents hold a bachelor's or a higher degree, 42% went to high school, and about 18% only attended basic school or less. The majority of the respondents were employed full time (56.4%), or were students (27.7%).

Measures

The survey consisted of the following questions: *fanographic* items such as interest for soccer (5-point scale, from 1 – *not interested at all*, to 5 – *very much interested*), favorite soccer club, age they became fans, season ticket holder or not, number of minutes they take to get to the home stadium, and number of home games attended during the previous season; and the three scales are shown as follows.

Place attachment scale (PAS). An adapted version of the PAS (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004) was used to measure PA. This scale was brought to the context of professional soccer by de Carvalho et al. (2011). In their work, the scale was adapted to examine the attachment to a stadium, substituting the wording related to recreational settings with wording related to soccer. However, due to the extension of the survey overall, we shortened the PAS. The Affective Attachment dimension scored the highest average in the work of de Carvalho et al. (2011). Based on the face validity of the items we selected three items corresponding to the dimensions of Affective Attachment, this is, current emotional connection with the stadium (for example, "I have a strong emotional bond with stadium X"), and two items corresponding to the dimension of Social bonding, this is, items related to the meaning, the memories, and the nostalgia towards the place (for example, "I associate special people in my life with stadium X"). The neighborhood where the stadium is located is generally also a meaningful place for the fans (Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999). Consequently, we added one item about the place where the stadium is located, namely "The place where stadium X is located means a lot

to me". A Dutch version of the PAS was constructed based on a pilot study (SELF-CITATION, 2013). The six items were judged on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *totally disagree*, to 5 – *totally agree*).

Sport spectator identification scale (SSIS). The SSIS (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001) was used to assess levels of TI, for example, "How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of your team?" Several studies provided evidence regarding the SSIS's factor structure, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity (Theodorakis, Dimmock, Wann, & Barlas, 2010; Theodorakis, Wann, de Carvalho, & Sarmento, 2010; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001). A Dutch version of the SSIS was constructed based on a pilot study (SELF-CITATION, 2013). The seven items were judged on a 7-point scale (for example, from 1 – *not at all*, to 7 – *very much*).

Sportscape as a constraint scale (SCS). For the SCS, to measure sportscape as a constraint for attendance (SC), people had to answer the question, "When you decide to not go to a soccer game, to what extent do the following motives affect your decision to not attend?" Items relative to the sportscape (for example, poor accessibility, insecurity and confusion, poor stadium conditions, ugly stadium) were derived both from existing research (Hill & Green, 2000; Kim & Trail, 2010; Wakefield et al., 1996; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995), and from an open answer question included in the pilot study (SELF-CITATION, 2013), asking the motives of the participants to not attend soccer games. The five items were judged on a 5-point scale (from 1 – *not at all a motive to not attend*, to 5 – *very much a motive to not attend*).

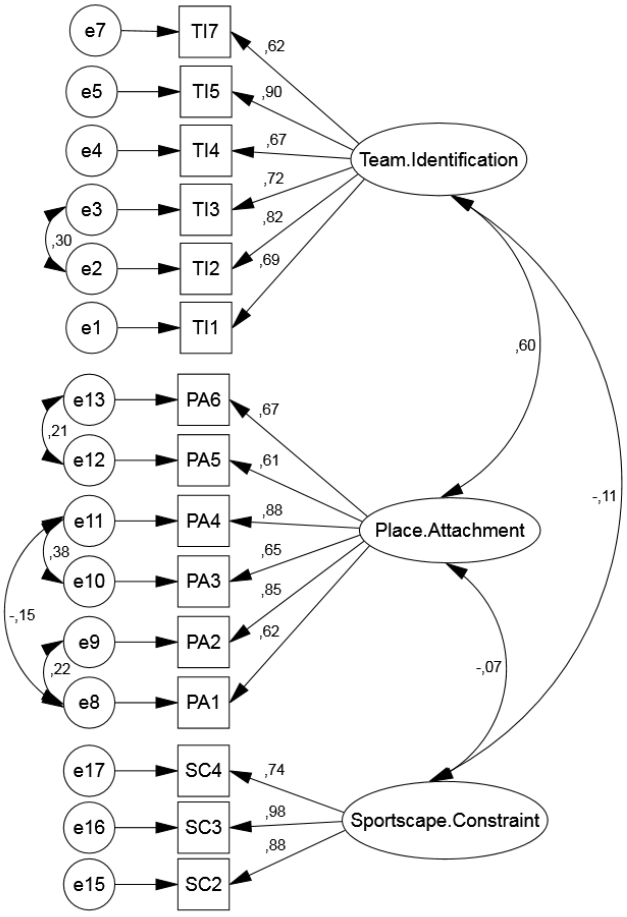
Data Analysis

We used SPSS 22.0 for descriptive analyses and AMOS 22.0 for multivariate analyses. Preliminarily, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We performed a curve

estimation for all the relationships in our model, and determined that all relationships were sufficiently linear to be tested using a co-variance based structural equation modeling algorithm used in AMOS. There was no multicollinearity between variables in our model (VIF < 1.0 for all relationships).

The CFA measurement model displayed in Figure 1 represented a good fit. We dropped TI6, and SC1 and SC5, given that the loadings of these items were lower than 0.6 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). We allowed error terms to co-vary (see Figure 1) based on their close meanings or wording, or because they appear next to each other in the survey, and therefore, there might have existed a systematic correlation.

Figure 1. Empirical results from the confirmatory factor analysis with the standardized coefficients. *e* = disturbance term.



The absolute fit measures goodness-of-fit index (GFI = .97), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.03), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.05, $p > .05$) indicated good fit. The chi-square test statistic ($\chi^2 = 868.5$, df = 82, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 10.6$) was significant ($p < .001$); this was likely inflated by the size of the calibration sample (n = 4,028) (McDonald & Marsh, 1990). The incremental fit measure adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI = .96) and the parsimonious fit measure comparative fit index (CFI = .98) indicated good fit as well.

Table 1 shows the reliability, the means and the standard deviations of the factors, convergent validity (CR > .7, CR > AVE, AVE > .5), and discriminant validity (MSV < AVE, ASV < AVE) as well (thresholds by Hair et al., 2010). We tested common method bias using a common latent factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Lee, 2003). PA was slightly affected by common method bias (CMB), but not the other factors. Therefore, we kept the common latent factor before imputing the composite variables PA, TI and SC. For the structural model we used the composite variables, which are adjusted for CMB.

In order to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, the model included paths from TI (independent variable) to SC (dependent variable), and from PA (mediator) to SC. In order to test Hypothesis 3, expecting that the relation between TI and SC would be partially mediated by PA, we used the bootstrapping method (Hayes & Matthes, 2009). We also included paths from the control variables age, sex, and financial status. We removed paths with non-significant t-values because no substantive meaningful interpretation could be added by them. The hypothesized model is presented in Figure 2.

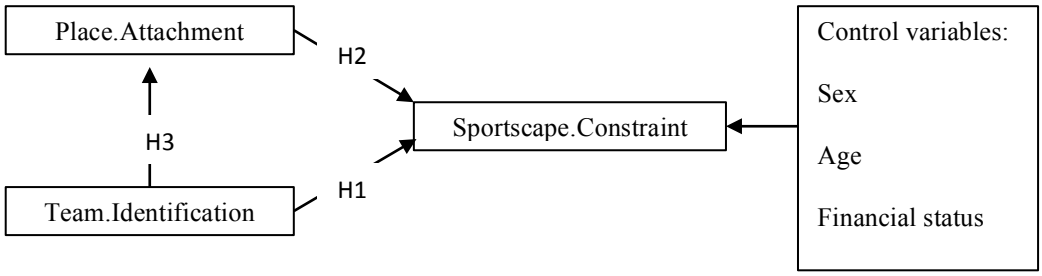
Table 1. Factor correlation matrix, convergent and discriminant validity, means, and standard deviations for scores of the latent variables team identification (TI), place attachment (PA), and sportscape as a constraint on attendance (SC)

Measure	*M*	*SD*	α	PA	TI	SC	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
PA (5-point scales)	2.97	0.96	.87	.72	-	-	.87	.52	.36	.18
TI (7-point scales)	5.49	1.00	.86	.60**	.74	-	.88	.55	.36	.19
SC (5-point scales)	2.39	1.16	.90	-.07**	-.11**	.87	.90	.76	.01	.01

Note: n = 4,028; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted, with square root of the AVE on the diagonal; MSV = Maximum shared variance; ASV = Average shared variance

** p < .01

Figure 2. Proposed model with the hypothesized relationships between variables and the control variables



Results

The fans included in this research were strongly interested in soccer (*M* = 4.69, *SD* = 0.55). They became fans around 12 years old (*M* = 12.23, *SD* = 9.22), and were fans for, on average, 23 years (*M* = 23.16, *SD* = 14.51). They attended almost nine home games during previous season (*M* = 8.68, *SD* = 7.77), with approximately one third of people attending three or less games (maximum = 30 home games). Most of them were fans of a team playing

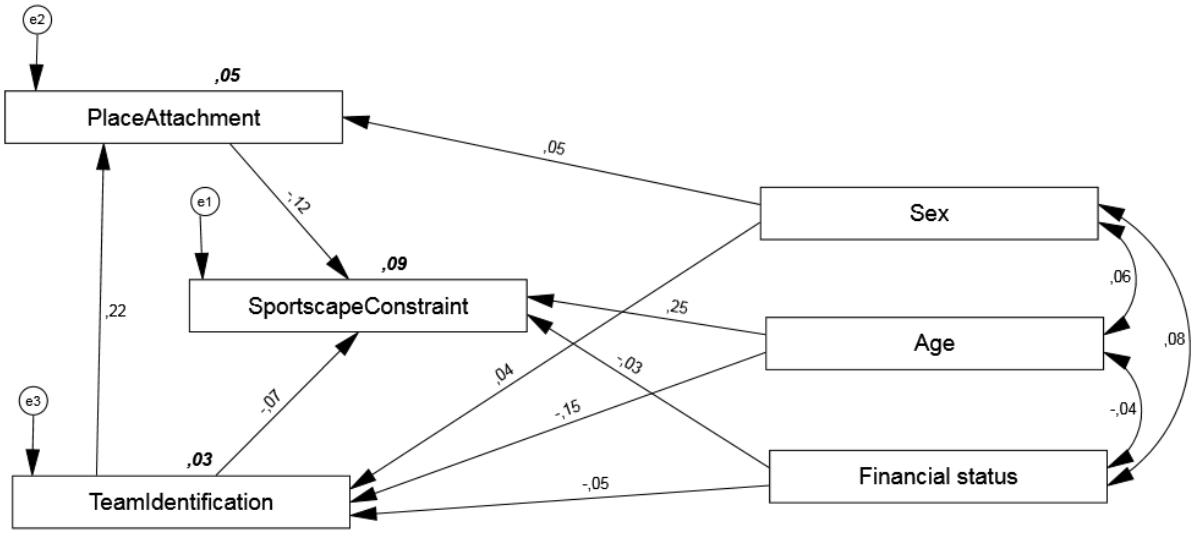
in the first league (96.3%), and 39.0% hold a season ticket. It took the respondents about one hour to reach the home stadium of their favorite club (M = 58.73, SD = 46.51). About 34% of the respondents live half an hour or less from the stadium, and around 10% take more than two hours to reach it.

The final structural model presented in Figure 3 represented an excellent fit to the data. There was a significant direct negative relationship from TI to SC, confirming Hypothesis 1. Specifically, the more the fans identified with their team, the less importance they placed on SC. There was also a significant direct negative relationship from PA to SC, confirming Hypothesis 2. Specifically, the more the fans were attached to the home stadium of their team, the less importance they placed on SC. It should be noted that the effect size of both relations was quite modest (b = -.07 and b =-.12, respectively).

TI was a significant predictor of SC, when excluding the mediator PA (b = -0.10, p < .001). The direct effect of TI on SC, when including the mediator PA was smaller but still significant (b = -0.06, p < .01). The indirect effect of TI on SC through the mediator PA was small but still significant (b = 0.02, p = .001). Results from the Sobel test confirmed that PA partially mediated the relationship between TI and SC (z = -6.78, p < .001). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was also supported.

The model explained 5% of the variance in PA, and 9% of the variance in SC. There were significant direct relations from age and financial status to SC. Age presented a positive moderate relationship with SC, and financial status a negative and small relationship with SC.

Figure 3. Empirical results from the structural model with the regression standardized coefficients and the proportions of explained variance in italic. *e* = disturbance term. GFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.004, RMSEA < 0.001 (p > .05), $\chi^2 = 1.421$, df = 3, χ^2 / df = 0.47, p > .05, AGF I = 1.00, and CFI = 1.00.



Discussion

The findings of our study revealed that TI was negatively related to SC, as proposed in Hypothesis 1. Explicitly, fans with a stronger TI were less constrained by a rather poor sportscape, than fans with a weaker TI. In other words, fans that considered the sportscape a stronger constraint on their attendance were the fans that were less attached to their club. Previous research has not explored the relationship of TI with other constraints, except with ticket pricing. The relationship between TI and ticket pricing as a constraint on attendance revealed that fans that were more strongly identified with the team, were less constrained by the price of the ticket (Wann et al., 2004). Therefore, in both the research of Wann et al. (2004) and the present research, the results showed a negative relationship between TI and a constraint on attendance, this is, between TI and ticket pricing, or between TI and poor sportscape, respectively. These results are in accordance to Wann and Branscombe (1990),

who claim that a fanatic fan will not be influenced by other factors in his / her choice to attend, because TI is the most important link to the team. As we referred to in the introduction, research has shown that TI is the stronger predictor of attendance. With this research, we add that the stronger the TI is, the less constrained by the inferior stadium conditions, this is, by the poor sportscape, the fans are.

Similarly, as postulated by Hypothesis 2, PA was negatively related to SC. More specifically, fans with a stronger PA consider that sportscape is less of a constraint on their attendance, than fans with a weaker PA. For the fans that are most connected to the place, the stadium is certainly more than a facility (Lee et al., 2012), since it feels like being home (Charleston, 2009). Research about PA is still emerging, and therefore, we cannot compare this result with results of previous studies. However, research in the field of place meanings, in general, has shown that if the PA people feel towards their own home is very strong, any environment may still be perceived as being good enough to live in (Billig, 2006). In the same manner, fans that have a strong connection with the stadium may recognize the fragilities of the facility, for instance, they may even have a negative sportscape perception, but at the end they care less than someone who has no connection with the stadium. The soccer stadium might represent, as their home represents, their castle, the place they do not want to leave, no matter what happens (Billig, 2006).

Fans often complain about seat comfort, food quality, or overpriced tickets. Repeated attendance could be considered as difficult to explain in the face of such negative evaluations of the stadium and its amenities (Lee et al., 2012). However, many fans continue to attend games, or they even attend more games than before, as Mapfurno (2014) showed about Belgian soccer attendance during recent years. This indicates that the attendance experience at and with the stadium goes beyond the pleasant sportscape, such as a comfortable stadium and a polite staff only. The quality of the sportscape itself might be, in the fans' perspective, better

or worse, but what seams to really matter when they are deciding to attend or not to attend a game, is the importance they confer to it.

PA was found to be a partial mediator of the negative relationship between TI and SC. In other words, TI positively predicts PA, which in turn negatively predicts SC. Thus, the mediator variable PA, clarifies the nature of the relationship between TI and SC. Specifically, TI predicts not only SC, but also predicts PA. When TI and PA are stronger, the fans feel less constrained by a poor sportscape, when they are deciding to attend a game. This result shows that the relationships with the club and with the stadium are not independent from each other. This interconnection between the club and the stadium is in accordance to what Westerbeek and Shilbury (1999) stated. Lee et al. (2012) also proposed a more holistic approach to understand the fans, in a sense that identification with both club and stadium cannot be disconnected when it comes to the relationship with other factors, inclusively, with the sportscape.

The strongest relationship found in the present research was a positive relationship between sportscape as a constraint and age. Specifically, the older the fans were, the more they cared about the sportscape as a constraint, this is, the more this was an important factor on their decision of not attending games. Younger fans were not so constrained by sportscape factors, and probably their constraints would be related to other factors, such as economic or organizational issues.

In this research, sex did not emerge as a predictor of SC. Contrary to what Hall and O'Mahony (2006) found, women did not place more importance to sportscape factors. Research has focused on finding differences between sexes when it comes to sports fandom and sports consumption (e.g., Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000). However, this trend might be changing, and differences between men and women might start being smaller when it comes to sports fandom, due to the fact that female fans might prefer to

prioritize their fan identity above their gender identity (Jones, 2008). On the other hand, differences might be currently smaller or inexistent, because men and women are acquiring more similar status in society. Time will show if these smaller differences are only a trend or a cultural change.

Limitations

According to our results, the relationships supporting the hypothesis were moderate, the effect size was small, and these relationships might have been enhanced by the vast sample size. However, these results should be taken into account for future research and from a marketing perspective as well, because they add to the existing literature on TI and PA.

A limitation of the current research is a possible positive bias of the answers of the fans. This sample is constituted by fans that are strongly interested in soccer, and that are a fan since a young age and for a long time. Despite the fact that the online survey was open to everyone, for instance, to fans with different kind of fanographics, maybe the fans with stronger interest in soccer, and a stronger emotional connection with the club and to the stadium were more motivated to answer questions about their own fandom. Therefore, this is not a representative sample. However, this restriction of range with respect to TI and PA might have attenuated an even stronger negative relationship between TI and SC, and between PA and SC. With a broader range of levels of TI or of PA, the prediction of SC and the mediation effect might have been stronger.

The percentage of female fans in this research is of 11%, and this might be a limitation, when it comes to understand women as fans. However, this proportion between men and women is similar to other studies on soccer fandom (for instance, Charleston, 2009). This difference between men and women's willingness to answer to surveys about themselves as soccer fans is probably due to two reasons. In one hand, it is possible that more men are soccer fans than women, in Belgium. For instance, research conducted in Flanders, Belgium,

found that 54% of men attend sport events on a yearly basis, while only 29% of women have this consumption behavior (Scheerder, Decraene, & Laermans, 2007). On the other hand, in the past, sport has typically been perceived as a male domain (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000), and women might think that their team identification and their interest for soccer is not strong enough to answer to fandom related surveys, and that they are still in a subordinate position in a world of soccer fandom dominated by men (Pope, 2011).

Another limitation is that the online collection might have kept people not using Internet out of the sample, for instance, older people. However, the age range was certainly varied, allowing us to have answers from a large age spectrum. On the other hand, the online data collection allowed us to include people that in this kind of research are usually neglected, because data are typically collected around the stadium. With this online data collection, instead of only reaching fans that are already attending games, we aimed to reach both attendants and non-attendants. Fans that are non-attendants are sometimes underestimated by research, because data is collected around the stadium, with the spectator fans. However, the non-attendant fans, staying at home, are potential consumers as well, as they have their own perceptions and feelings about the club and the stadium, and reasons to attend or not to attend live games.

Another added value to this online data collection is the fact that the sample included a high number of respondents, who are fans from various clubs in the country, and who live at diverse distances from their club. Even though the overwhelming majority of the fans were fans of a first league club, they were fans of varied clubs, from the ones usually on the top of the ranking, to the ones with worse rankings. In addition, the different distances the fans lived from their home stadium is illustrative of the reality of the different clubs, as one third of the fans lived half an hour or less from the their home stadium, but 10% lived more than two hours from the stadium.

Marketing Implications

The results of the present study indicate that the emotional connection of people with the stadium is negatively related to the importance they place on the sportscape. Despite the rather poor sportscape, people are still attached to the place they already know, and where they have memories and experiences. A brand new stadium, such as the ones that the Royal Belgian Football Association is planning to build together with some clubs (Martens, 2012), might be meaningless to a fan, despite the good facilities. It constitutes a challenge to make the fans forget the old stadium and start enjoying the new one. The promotion of the club, such as outdoor posters, or publicity in general, should focus not only on the club, as is usually the case, but also on the stadium. The fact that PA is a mediator of the relationship of TI with SC provides support to our model, and also to the idea that sports service providers, when establishing their marketing strategies, should not look at the club and at the venue separately, but simultaneously. In fact, they should consider cobranding the club, the venue, and even the community (Lee et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the older the fans were, the more constrained they were by a rather poor sportscape, and the more this was a factor on their decision of not attending games. More specifically, the lack of safety was a key concern for older people. If clubs want to attract more elderly people, the improvement of the sportscape might be a priority, or at least, the communication with the fans should show when the club is paying attention and improving safety issues.

Future Research

The results of this research cannot be generalized to other sports and populations, as it is specific to Belgian soccer fans. The exploratory nature of the study and the lack of research in

this field make this study a good basis for research and provide opportunity for future research in other contexts, such as other sports or countries.

The novelty effect states that clubs playing in new facilities attract more fans for a certain period of time (Howard & Crompton, 2003). This increased number of spectators may be due to curiosity to get to know the new stadium, or to the better sportscape of the new facilities. However, this "honeymoon effect" only lasts from one year, when previous attendance numbers are largely exceeded, up to five years, when previous attendance numbers are only slightly exceeded (Howard & Crompton, 2003). In addition, research has shown that fans have stronger feelings for the older stadiums than for the new ones (Charleston, 2009; Giulianotti, 1999). Clubs and stadium owners might think that having a new stadium is *per se* a solution to attract more spectators to the stadium but research has shown differently. Future research should focus on analyzing this novelty effect together with the PA of the fans to the old and the new stadium, and should put some effort on how to make the transition from the old stadium to the new one.

Constraints on attendance have not been deeply analyzed in the literature. As we stated, research has focused on motives for attendance and on spectator segmentation based on demographic characteristics and motives for attendance. Future research should focus on differences between segments of spectators, based on their constraints to attend games. Specifically, the role of sportscape as a constraint for each segment should be explored.

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